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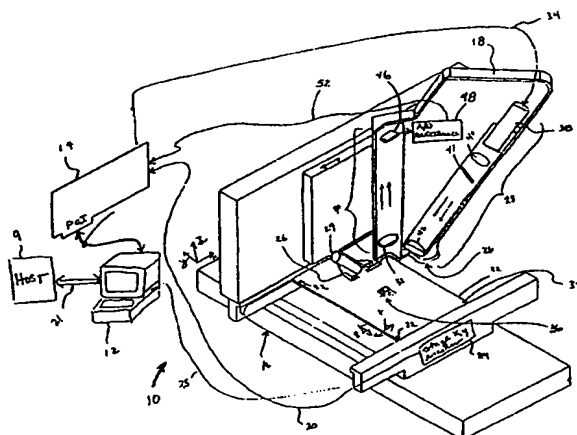
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(54) Title: SOLDER PASTE INSPECTION SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: A novel inspection system (10) for inspecting an article of manufacture, such as a printed circuit board (22), is disclosed, where the system (10) includes a strobed illuminator (38) adapted to project light through a reticle (41) so as to project a pattern of light onto an area of the printed circuit board. A board transport (16) responsively positions the board (22) to at least two distinct positions, where each position corresponding to a different phase of the projected light. Also included is a detector (18) adapted to acquire at least two images of the area, each image corresponding to one of the at least two different phases. An encoder (24) monitors the movement of the board (22) and outputs a position output (20), and a processor (14) connected to the encoder (24), the board transport (16), the illuminator (38) and the detector (18) controllably energizes the illuminator (18) to expose the area as a function of the position output (20), the processor (14) co-siting the at least two images and constructing a height map image (4) with the co-sited images.

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SOLDER PASTE INSPECTION SYSTEM

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to the field of electronic circuit board
5 manufacture. More particularly, this invention relates to an improved system for inspecting solder paste deposited on a circuit board during manufacture.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Circuit boards that carry electronic integrated circuits as well as
10 discrete electronic components are well known. A circuit board substrate is prepared with predetermined conductor paths and pads for receiving the lead of an electronic component such as integrated circuit chips, resistors or capacitors. During the circuit board fabrication process, solder paste bricks are placed onto the board substrate at appropriate positions. The solder paste is usually applied
15 by placing a screen onto the substrate, applying solder paste through the screen openings and removing the screen from the substrate. The circuit board electronic components are then positioned onto the substrate, preferably with a pick and place machine, with leads of the electronic components placed on the respective solder paste bricks. The circuit board is passed through an oven after
20 all of the components are positioned on a substrate to melt the solder paste thus creating an electrical as well as mechanical connection between the components and the substrate.

The size of the solder paste bricks and the accuracy with which they must be placed on the substrate has become increasing smaller and tighter
25 with the increased emphasis on miniaturization in the electronics industry. Solder paste brick heights can be as small as 100 microns and the height of the solder paste brick must often be measured to within 1 percent of the designed height and size. The center-to-center spacing between solder bricks is

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sometimes 200 microns. Too little solder paste can result in no electrical connection between the lead of an electronic component and the pad of the circuit board substrate. Too much paste can result in bridging and short-circuiting between the leads of a component.

5 A single circuit board can cost thousands and even tens of thousands of dollars to manufacture. Testing of a circuit board after the fabrication process is complete can detect errors in solder paste placement and component lead connection, but often the only remedy for a faulty board is rejection of the entire board. It is accordingly imperative that a circuit board be
10 inspected during the fabrication process so that improper solder paste placement can be detected prior to the placement of the electronic components onto the substrate. Such in-process solder inspection reduces the cost of failure since expensive components have not yet been placed onto the circuit board.

 Current solder paste inspection systems have a number of limitations.
15 First, such systems are typically costly and the cost of the system must be borne by board manufacturing prices, and thus finished circuit board prices. Further, current systems are relatively inflexible when tasked with inspecting features of different levels of detail. Such current systems are unable to measure coarse objects with the same sensor, or optical train, as fine objects. Thus, two
20 different optical trains of differing capabilities are required to provide two levels of resolution and throughput, adding significantly to system cost.

 Another limitation of current solder paste inspection systems is their susceptibility to vibration. In these systems, the target must remain in a known position in order to achieve high accuracy measurements. Vibration causes
25 features on the target surface to appear in different places than expected. Such spatial error adversely affects the accuracy and repeatability of solder paste height, volume and area measurements, and can lead to the acceptance of a defective solder brick, or the rejection of an otherwise acceptable brick.

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Another limitation of current inspection systems is that of inspection speed. Since in-process solder paste inspection is generally performed in the assembly line, the inspection step itself must be done as quickly as possible in order to minimize the impact of inspection on the assembly line's throughput.

User-friendliness is another limitation of current systems. One example of this limitation is that current solder paste inspection systems require users to program a number of points used by the system to establish a reference plane for solder paste height and volume calculation. Eliminating such user setup would significantly facilitate user interaction with the inspection system.

Finally, traditional solder paste inspection systems use relatively high powered lasers (Class III) for imaging. For safety, the FDA has placed strict safety precautions upon the use of such lasers. These precautions can render use of such devices cumbersome. Thus, there is a current need to provide a solder paste inspection system that does not employ any Class III lasers whatsoever.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A novel inspection system for inspecting articles of manufacture, such as a printed circuit board is disclosed, where the system includes a strobed illuminator adapted to project light through a reticle so as to project a pattern of light onto an area of the printed circuit board. A transport mechanism responsively positions the board to at least two distinct positions, where each position corresponding to a different phase of the projected light. Also included is a detector adapted to acquire at least two images of the area, each image corresponding to one of the at least two different phases. A position encoder monitors the movement of the board and outputs a position output, and a processor connected to the encoder, the transport mechanism, the strobed illuminator and the detector controlledly energizes the strobed illuminator to expose the area as a function of the position output, the processor co-siting the at least two images and constructing a height

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map image with the co-sited images. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention and method, the detector is further adapted to acquire an additional image of the area as a function of a position of the target, and the processor operates upon three images of the area to provide the compensated height map. In
5 another embodiment, the illuminator is strobed at least two times within a short period of time, such as two milliseconds, to reduce vibration sensitivity of the system. In another embodiment of the invention, solder paste volume is computed from the acquired images and the height map. Another embodiment provides a
10 low resolution, high speed mode where charge from a plurality of pixels is combined to form a larger effective pixel, for use in high speed applications. Optionally, the height map is de-tilted in order to compensate for physically or algorithmically tilted targets.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 FIG.1 is a diagrammatic view of a solder paste inspection system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG.2 is a diagram of the astigmatic transmission pattern on the reticle.

FIG.3 is a block diagram of the method of the present invention.

20 FIG.4A is a map of the height of the target, before the de-tilt compensation is performed, and FIG. 4B is a height map after de-tilting compensation is performed.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG.1 shows solder paste inspection system 10, which includes
25 processor 14, X-Y system 16 and optical sensor system 18. Solder paste inspection system 10 is couplable to host device 19 through network 21 or the like, in order to send and receive information related to solder inspection on printed circuit boards. For example, system 10 may receive location information relating to specific solder paste locations, and their respective

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nominal volume. Preferably, processor 14 is disposed within microcomputer 12, which microcomputer 12 is a known device having an input such as a keyboard, and mouse, and an output in the form of a video monitor. Additionally, microcomputer 12 preferably includes an industry-standard architecture and
5 microprocessor. One example, is a personal computer running a Microsoft Windows® operating system with an Intel Pentium® III processor.

Processor 14 is preferably embodied upon a computer peripheral card with an industry-standard form factor. Further, processor 14 is preferably adapted to couple to microcomputer 12 through a standard Peripheral
10 Component Interconnect (PCI) bus. Processor 14 can then transfer data to and from microcomputer 12 using a known Direct Memory Access (DMA) transfer method to facilitate high-speed data transfer.

Processor 14 receives the digital video data from analog/digital electronics 48 and performs a number of functions on such data. For example,
15 processor 14 triggers sensor system 18 to acquire images based upon encoder information received from encoders 24 through line 20. Processor 14 also communicates with sensor system 18 in order to control its operational mode (i.e. high-resolution vs. high-speed). Processor 14 receives previously digitized video data from sensor system 18 for storage in a frame buffer (not shown).
20 Processor 14 operates upon the digitized video images to correct for defects in the particular CCD array 46 in sensor system 18. Processor 14 is also used to compensate for effects of known optical distortions on the height map. Each of the mentioned functions is described below in more detail.

Processor 14 is coupled to X-Y system 16 through line 20. X-Y system
25 16 also includes X and Y motors (not shown) which position circuit board 22 in respective X and Y axes. X and Y motors are operably coupled to X and Y encoders (shown diagrammatically at block 24) to provide data indicative of circuit board position along X and Y axes to processor 14. Motion commands are sent over line 25 to system 16. System 16 is extraordinarily stable and its

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motion is controlled to within approximately one micron over approximately 280 microns of distance travelled. If system 16 is not sufficiently stable, additional processing in the electronics may be needed to provide equivalent accuracy and repeatability. In the preferred embodiment, each of the linear
5 encoders preferably has a resolution of about 0.5 μm , as can be purchased from Renishaw. Thus, through cooperation, computer 12 and X-Y system 16 precisely move circuit board 22 as desired in the X and Y directions at arrows 7,8, respectively.

Optical sensor system 18 includes camera system 30, projection system
10 28, circular illuminator 26 and laser range finder 29. Camera system 30 includes camera lens 31, a detector 46 and a set of A/D electronics 48. Projection system 28 includes flashlamp 38, condenser 40, reticle 41 and projector lens 42. All the components within system 18 are fixed within a housing for the system. System 18 is fixedly attached to a translation stage (not
15 shown) to provide z movement for focus control.

Projection system 28, in combination with the stage movement, projects three phases of structured light onto solder paste features 36. Flashlamp 38 is preferably a high-speed strobe lamp filled with xenon gas, projecting broadband white light. A high speed discharge circuit (not shown) within housing 18
20 drives lamp 38, as timing signals through channel 34 causes lamp 38 to fire three times within a short period of time, preferably at least one millisecond between strobes in order to ensure that the flashlamp remains stable. High speed discharge circuits capable of providing three flashes within such a short time are critical to ensuring high system throughput. One example of such a high speed
25 discharge circuit is provided in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. / , filed March 9, 2000, entitled "Rapid Firing Flashlamp Discharge Circuit" assigned to the assignee of the present application and herein incorporated by reference. Other types of illumination sources are usable with the present invention, such as a pulsed laser or a pulsed LED, as long they are

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able to provide a short duration, high energy successive pulses within the preferred time period. Condenser lens 40 collects light from the flashlamp 38 and directs it through reticle 41 to the projector lens 42, which forms a sinusoidally varying fringe image on the solder deposits 36. Preferably, reticle
5 41 has an astigmatic pattern and the projector lens is astigmatic, together reliably forming sinusoidally varying astigmatic patterns with low harmonic distortion as shown in FIG.2.

Projector lens system 28 is preferably doubly telecentric, in that it is telecentric in reticle space and target space (at solder paste deposits 36 on board
10 22). The double telecentricity is important since it allows the height, volume and area calculations to be independent of the location of the solder paste within the field of view and depth of focus. This characteristic also provides lower distortion for the system as a whole, which is important because the target moves between exposures.

15 Camera system 30 views the projected fringes on the target of solder paste deposits 36, and acquires and digitizes images in rapid succession. Camera system 30 does not include a grating, as is incorporated in moire interferometry systems. Preferably, camera system 30 is telecentric in target space and has low distortion for the same reasons given above. The field of
20 view of camera system 30 is approximately 10 mm in the y direction and 20 mm in the x direction. The size of the field of view is selected to maximize the field coverage while still maintaining sufficient resolution of the target. CCD array 46 is a megapixel array and as such is able to inspect solder paste features of fine detail. For example, solder features for components such as a Chip Scale
25 Package (CSP) or a microball grid array can be inspected. However, by sampling or combining individual pixels, larger equivalent pixels are generated which facilitates inspection at higher speeds. One way that such sampling is done is by decimating the photo-charge of four pixels into an equivalent pixel within CCD array 46 itself. This decimation provides a faster CCD image

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readout rate than that attainable with standard resolution (two times faster) and thus reduces subsequent processing time. In the preferred embodiment, the inspection mode can be rapidly switched between the high-resolution mode and the high-speed mode for different solder paste features on the same board, based upon the type of components that will be found in different areas of board 22. As such, optical sensor system 18 employs a dual-resolution capability in the same unit.

CCD 46 is a 1024 x 1024 pixel area array CCD image sensor, where each pixel generates charge in response to light exposure. In the preferred embodiment CCD array 46 is a multi-tap CCD array providing image data through four taps at a rate of 20 megapixels per second, per tap. Thus, CCD array 46 is able to provide image data at a rate of 80 megapixels per second. CCD array 46 can be a commercially available CCD array such as the model THX7888, available from Thomson-CSF Semiconductor. Preferably, camera system 30 samples the target at a pitch of 20 microns square on the target surface.

Circular illuminator 26 receives illumination control signals from processor 14 through illumination control channel 34 and are essential in properly illuminating fiducial marks 32. Once located, the fiducial marks provide a circuit board frame of reference for locating other features on board 32. Illuminator 26 preferably includes a plurality of diffuse LEDs which cast diffuse illumination on circuit board 22. Illuminator 26 also preferably comprises LEDs that are oriented to direct near specular illumination upon marks 32. Both diffuse illumination and near specular illumination are used in the imaging.

Laser range finder 29 is a low power laser rated no higher than Class II, which projects a spot onto the target which is viewed by camera system 30. Laser 29 can be of such a low power because its sole function is measuring the range to the target in order to establish system focus. Before any of the triply

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exposed fringe images are acquired, the range to the target from finder 29 is measured. The choice of a Class II laser is preferable in view of more stringent FDA safety precautions for Class III lasers. Such safety precautions add unnecessary complexity to the use of the solder paste inspection system.

5 System 10 is characterized by continuous X-Y stage motion while inspection occurs, as shown in FIG. 3. In operation, at box 200 computer 12 sends instructions to initiate X-Y stage 16 movement to scan desired solder paste area 36. In the preferred embodiment, four exposures occur for each height computation; three images, each of a different phase, to be used in height
10 computation and one image of the laser spot for focus control. It is understood that the present invention contemplates the use of sets of two, three or more images, each set having images of a different phase, for use in constructing a height map. The discussion below concentrates on the three image, preferred embodiment, height computation. The first exposure is from range finder 29,
15 which illuminates the target with a laser spot and hence exposes CCD 46 in camera system 30, at box 202. The measurement from range finder 29 dictates the amount of z movement for focus adjustment. Next, three successive exposures of fringe patterns of the target occur at each of three distinct positions which are separated by an integral number of target pixel boundaries, so that the
20 difference in phase between each of the successive exposures is approximately 120 degrees (box 204). Specifically, at box 206, the first fringe exposure is made at position y(a) and CCD 46 acquires an image of the target 36. Stage 16 continues to move, and at position y(b), the second fringe exposure is made and CCD 46 acquires another image of the target 36 (box 208). Stage 16 continues
25 to move, and at position y(c), the third fringe exposure is made and CCD 46 acquires another image of the target 36 (box 210). The velocity of motion and the spacing between exposures is such that the three exposures in box 204 have occurred within approximately 2 milliseconds, which allows the system to be substantially insensitive to vibration. The strobe lamp provides illumination of

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such short duration that none of the three images have any appreciable blurring due to the continuous motion. The three exposures have been taken as a function of stage 16 position, so that the distance between exposures is preferably an integral number of target pixels, where a "target pixel" is the area which is imaged by a pixel in CCD 46. Preferably, the stage movement between exposures is seven integral pixels, although other distances are suitable for use with the present invention. Additionally, while the preferred embodiment is to shift the stage by an integral number of pixels for computational efficiency, non-integral numbers can be used with equal ease but with less straightforward computations.

Additionally, rapidly pulsing strobe lamp 38 essentially freezes the image of feature 36 even as system 18 and target 36 move relative to each other. Such freezing eliminates the time previously required for prior art systems to stop and shoot multiple images, so as to increase system throughput.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the images from each of the exposures 206, 208, 210 are stored in CCD 46 and then transferred to processor 14. Typical CCD operation does not occur quickly enough to acquire three images while maintaining suitable vibration immunity. However, a method of rapidly acquiring three images in a CCD frame array is provided in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. __/__, filed __, entitled "Inspection System With Vibration Resistant Video Capture," assigned to the assignee of the present application and incorporated herein by reference. However, the present invention is not limited to such data storage and subsequent transfer. For example, the invention is equally well suited to real time transfer of the image data after each of the exposures is made.

Camera system 30 provides analog data to analog/digital electronics 48. The image data is provided to analog/digital electronics for conversion into digital form, and provided to processor 14 through digital video channel 52.

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At box 212, height is computed according to the equations described below, which is described in terms of the three exposures taken in the preferred embodiment. The processor receives three digitized images from camera system 30. Preferably, the images are digitized before leaving housing 18. In order to compute the height image, H, processor 14 first co-sites the images to make a correspondence between each of the three pixels (one in each image) corresponding to the same physical location. Co-siting is accomplished by offsetting an acquired digitized image by a distance corresponding to the stage movement, and the three resulting co-sited images are called A, B and C in the discussion below.

A generalized approach allows us to compute H from images where the phase differences between successive images are known but unequal. The normalized intensity value for each pixel in the three-image co-sited set is given in Equation 1):

$$\begin{pmatrix} A \\ B \\ C \end{pmatrix} = r \begin{pmatrix} 1 + m \cos(\phi - \phi_a) \\ 1 + m \cos(\phi - \phi_b) \\ 1 + m \cos(\phi - \phi_c) \end{pmatrix} \quad (1)$$

where r is the normalized reflectance at the pixel, the known phase angles of the three fringes are ϕ_a , ϕ_b , ϕ_c , and the relative phase ϕ of the fringe at the pixel is related to the projected fringe frequencies, pixel coordinate and z position by Equation 2):

$$\phi = 2\pi(f_x x + f_y y + f_z z) \quad (2)$$

To linearize the problem and make it more easily computed, the quantities are defined as in Equation 3):

$$x = r m \cos \phi$$

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$$y = r m \sin \phi \quad (3)$$

Then, Equation 1) can be re-written as in Equation 4):

$$\begin{pmatrix} A \\ B \\ C \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & \cos \phi_a & \sin \phi_a \\ 1 & \cos \phi_b & \sin \phi_b \\ 1 & \cos \phi_c & \sin \phi_c \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} r \\ x \\ y \end{pmatrix} \quad (4)$$

Through standard linear algebra, the system matrix in Equation 4) can be solved for r , x , and y . From x , y , the phase ϕ of the pixel can be computed by the processor in Equation 5):

10

$$\phi = \tan^{-1}(y/x) \quad (5)$$

Once the phase ϕ is computed in Equation 5), we multiply by an appropriate calibration scaling factor to compute the height of the pixel. Once all the heights for all the pixels are computed, the height map, H , is completed and ready for summary processing and display, as appropriate. An example height map is shown in FIG. 4A.

Once the height map, H , of the surface of interest is constructed, microprocessor 12 optionally corrects the height map for the tilt, in a process known as de-tilting the substrate (box 214). An example de-tilted height map corresponding to the image in FIG. 4A is shown in FIG. 4B. In the past, it was necessary for users to enter a number of program points in order to help the inspection system establish a reference plane for subsequent measurements. In the preferred embodiment, such user-intervention is rendered unnecessary by using the method provided in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/607,846, filed February 27, 1996, entitled "Apparatus and Method for Estimating Background Tilt and Offset," assigned to the assignee of the present

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application, and incorporated herein by reference. Other de-tilt algorithms are equally applicable for use in the present invention.

Preferably, processor 14 performs a number of compensatory functions. In particular, processor 14 corrects for errors in the gain and offset of CCD 46
5 on a pixel by pixel basis, in addition to correcting for variations in the illumination field provided by projection system 28. Processor 14 also corrects for Z wrap caused by optical distortion in projection system 28 and camera 30. Finally, processor 14 corrects for strobe to strobe variation in gross energy output.

10 Finally, computer 12 computes the volume of individual solder paste deposits, as the edges of the deposits are also known, at least from the height map (box 216).

Although the present invention has been described with respect to preferred embodiments, changes can be made in form and detail without departing from the
15 spirit and scope of the invention. In particular, while the present invention is disclosed in terms of the preferred embodiment of three exposures for use in constructing a height map, it is understood that the apparatus and methods disclosed are equally well suited (with appropriate modifications for height
computation, co-siting algorithms and the like) for use in constructing a height map
20 using two phases, as well as the use of four or more phases.

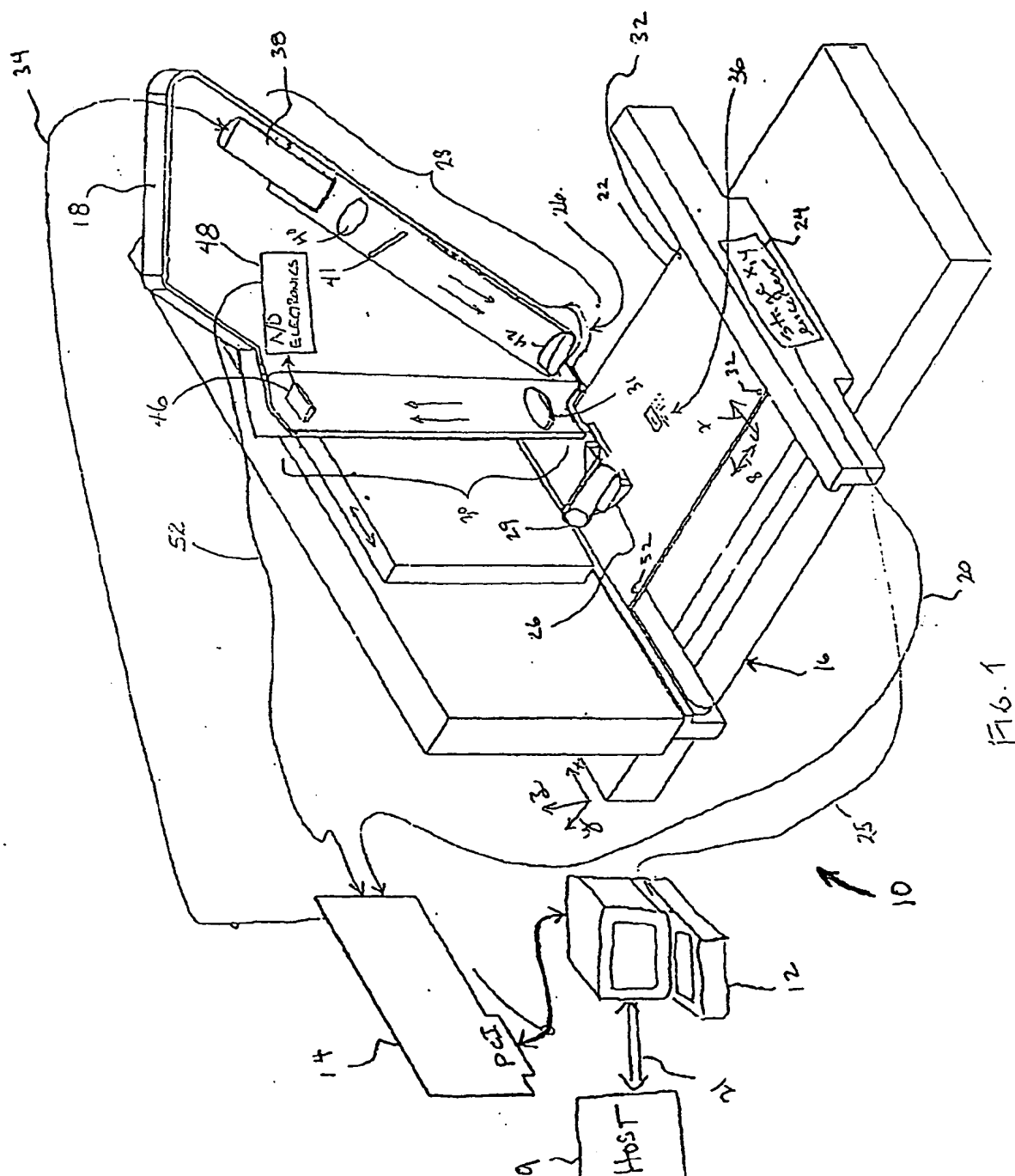
- 14 -

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An inspection system for inspecting an article of manufacture such as a printed circuit board, the system comprising:
 - a strobed illuminator adapted to project light through a reticle so as to project a pattern of light onto an area of the printed circuit board;
 - a board transport responsively positioning the board to at least two distinct positions, each position corresponding to a different phase of the projected light;
 - a detector adapted to acquire at least two images of the area, each image corresponding to one of the at least two different phases;
 - an encoder outputting a position output; and
 - a processor coupled to the encoder, the board transport, the illuminator and the detector, the processor adapted to controlledly energize the illuminator to expose the area as a function of the position output, the processor co-siting the at least two images and to construct a height map image with the co-sited images.
2. The system of claim 1 where the inspection system inspects solder paste deposits.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein the strobed illuminator is energized at least two times within a fixed period of time.
4. The system of claim 3, wherein the fixed period of time is approximately one millisecond.
5. The system of claim 4, wherein the approximately one millisecond separation provides improved immunity from vibration of the board.
6. The system of claim 1, wherein:
 - the detector is further adapted to acquire an additional image of the area;
 - and
 - the processor operates upon three images of the area to provide the compensated height map.
7. The system of claim 1, wherein the processor further comprises a circuit for compensating the height map for a tilt with respect to a reference plane.

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8. The system of claim 1, wherein the detector includes a plurality of pixels, and further that the detector is operable in a first and a second mode, the second mode accomplished by decimating charge from the pixels into an equivalent charge for a equivalent pixel, where the equivalent pixel is larger in effective area than the pixel.
9. The system of claim 8, wherein the plurality of pixels is 4.
10. The system of claim 8, wherein each pixel has a length of about 20 microns.
11. The system of claim 8, wherein the equivalent pixel has a length of about 40 microns.
12. The system of claim 8, wherein the processor is further adapted to select between the first and second modes based upon a characteristic of the area.
13. The system of claim 12, wherein the characteristic is a known component type to be placed on the area.
14. The system of claim 1, wherein the illuminator comprises a white strobe lamp.
15. The system of claim 1, wherein the illuminator comprises a short duration, high power pulsed lamp.
16. A method for inspecting a target, the method comprising:
illuminating a solder paste feature with a pattern of light;
encoding a position of the target;
acquiring at least two images of the target at two distinct positions of the target, the two images acquired as a function of the target position; and
calculating a height of the target based upon the at least two acquired images.
17. The method of claim 16, further comprising acquiring an additional image of the target at another distinct position of the target, where the step of calculating the height is computed as a function of the at least two acquired images and the additional image.



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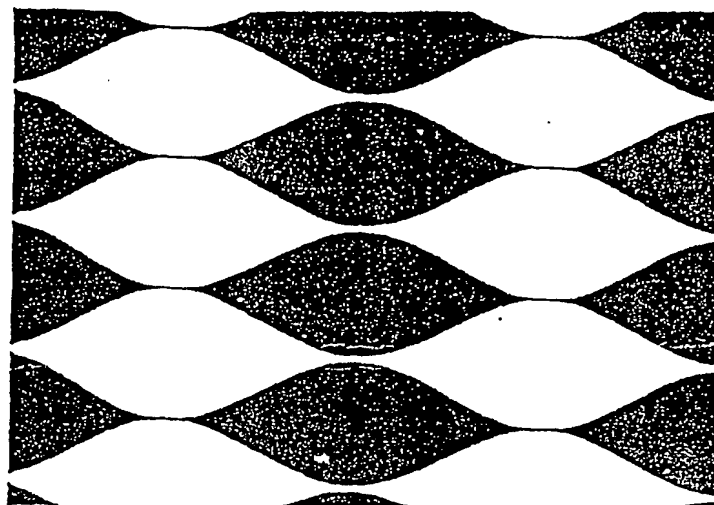


FIG. 2

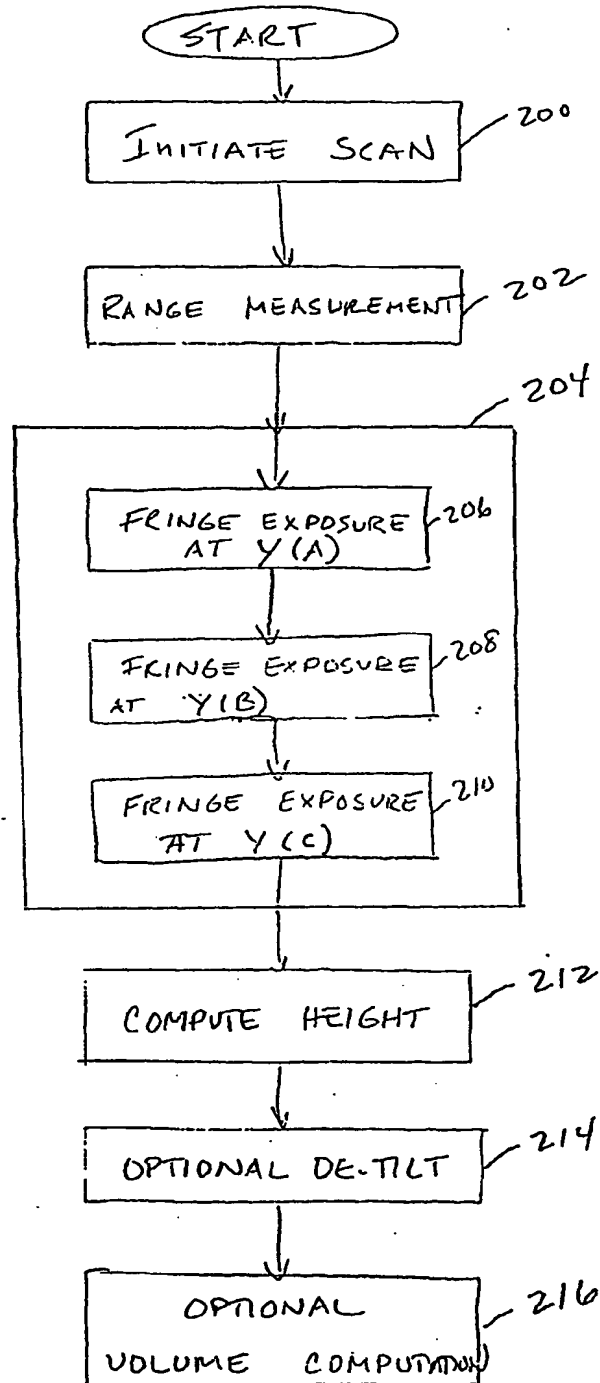


FIG. 3

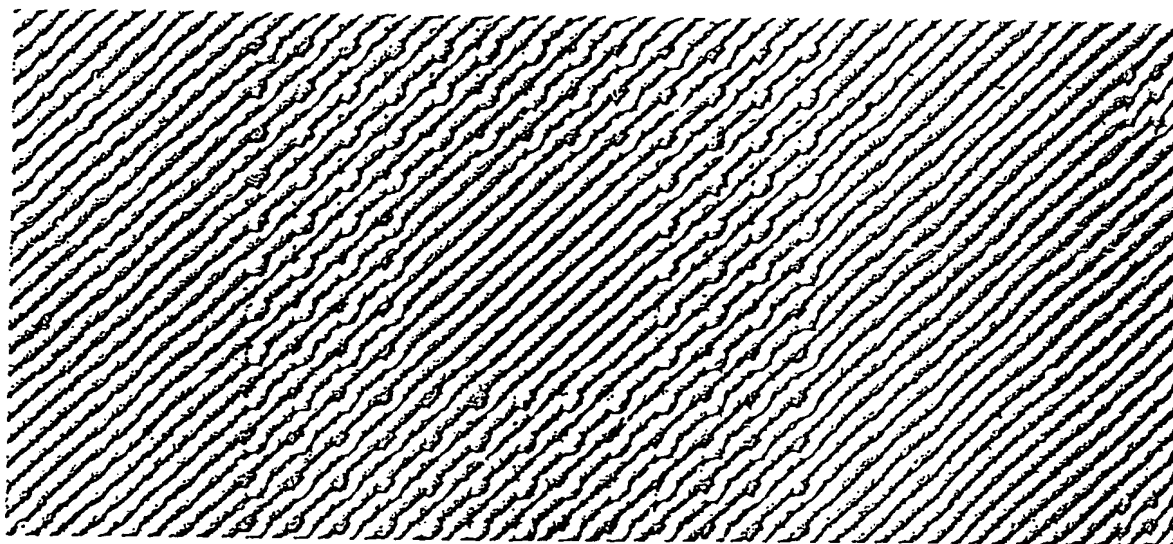


FIG 4A

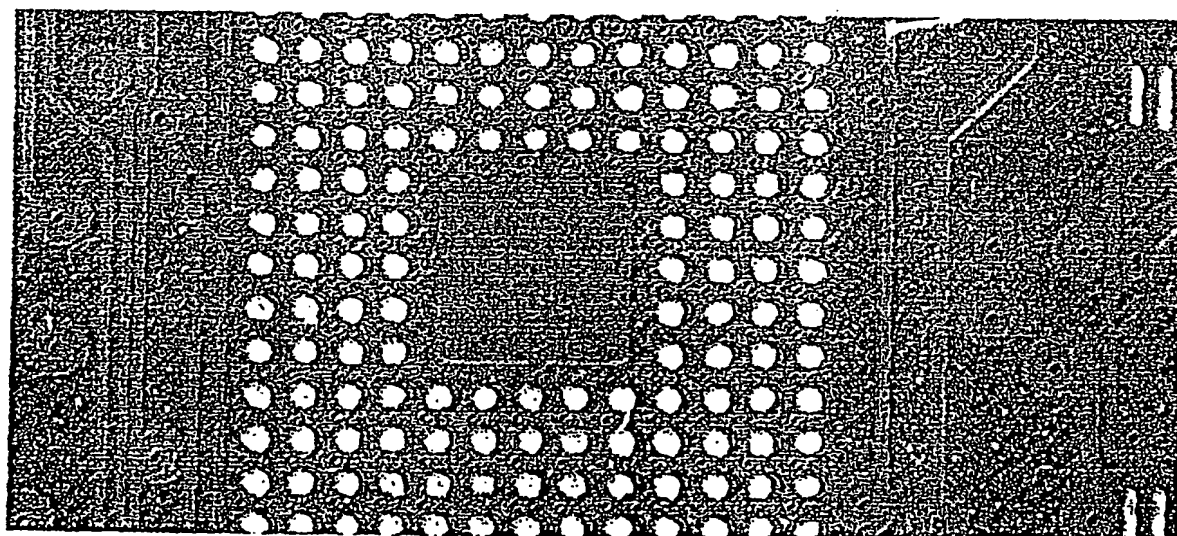


FIG. 4B

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/42760

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER																				
IPC(7) : H04N 7/18; G06K 9/00																				
US CL : 348/86, 87, 92, 126; 382/144, 145, 147, 149; 356/374, 375, 376																				
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC																				
B. FIELDS SEARCHED																				
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)																				
U.S. : 348/86, 87, 92, 126; 382/144, 145, 147, 149; 356/374, 375, 376																				
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched																				
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)																				
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT																				
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.																		
X	US 5,912,984 A (MICHAEL et al) 15 June 1999, col. 3, lines 12-36.	1-17																		
X	US 5,039,868 A (KOBAYASHI et al) 13 August 1991, col. 4, lines 18-37.	1-17																		
X	US 5,761,337 A (NISHIMURA et al) 02 June 1998, col. 8, lines 5-15.	1-17																		
X	US 5,686,994 A (TOKURA) 11 November 1997, col. 3, lines 28-44.	1-17																		
X	US 5,684,530 A (WHITE) 04 November 1997, col. 3, lines 57-67, col. 4, lines 1-8.	1-17																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.																				
<table border="0"> <tr> <td>* Special categories of cited documents:</td> <td>"T"</td> <td>later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</td> <td>"X"</td> <td>document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date</td> <td>"Y"</td> <td>document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason. (as specified)</td> <td>"&"</td> <td>document member of the same patent family</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			* Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention	"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone	"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art	"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason. (as specified)	"&"	document member of the same patent family	"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means			"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		
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Date of the actual completion of the international search		Date of mailing of the international search report																		
02 MAY 2001		05 JUN 2001																		
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